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ABSTRACT

This article, part of a collective research study on the role of expertise in implementing employment policy programmes, focuses on the activities—specifically, making judgments and interacting with others—of public-sector personnel working in the framework of one of France’s many experimental employment programmes, the Occupational Transition Contract. This unique, innovative project is in many respects in the spotlight of French current events. The special expertise of public agents working to assist redundant employees may be observed in how they successively or simultaneously use empathy, understanding and an ability to objectify throughout their interactions with persons “enrolled” in the programme. After detailing the programme’s potential opportunities, we apply Christian Bessy and Francis Chateauraynaud’s sociology of perception to study the dominant type of expertise used in it. We then bring in components of disposition sociology to bring to light the segmentation distinguishing actors from one another, the point being to explain regularities in types of expertise and how those may oscillate depending on the conditions in which the expertise is profited, the varied, polymorphous profiles and experience of members of the small groups in charge of establishing and implementing the Occupational Transition Contract in particular areas of France. Attention to these activities and to interaction between programme “référents” (counsellors) and members brings to light how labour norms and accords have been profoundly transformed in the shift from the “lifelong job” notion to that of “sustainable employability.”

A subject for discussion omnipresent in both the media and the academic world since the beginning of the 21st century, the French search for its own version of “flexicurity” has experienced a process whereby its emergence has relied on collective agreements and public policies that have taken the form of more or less enduring arrangements that are often experimental if not really innovative (Revue de l’IRES 2009; Morange 2010; Formation Emploi 2011; Zimmermann 2011). Thus we see a huge process of reform of unemployment insurance and the organisation of jobseekers that is based especially on the contractualisation of the relationship in the form of an action plan with stages and objectives and greater supervision through the use of weekly face-to-face interviews (Behagel, Crépon and Gurgand 2009; Divay 2009; Gratadour...
2009; Gratadour and Le Barbanchon 2009). The “Occupational Transition Contract” or Contrat de Transition Professionnelle (CTP) is part of this process and has led to an innovative and unusual experiment that was intended in 2006 to prefigure a plan to give greater security to occupational mobility and “revolutionise the right to a job,” something that had been in gestation and the subject of political and legal debate for more than fifteen years (Lefebvre 2009). Since the autumn of 2008 it has also been put forward as an important weapon in the fight against unemployment in a period of economic downturn. Implemented by the Ministry of Employment, initially assigned to the AFPA (Association Nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes—National Association for Adult Job-Training) in seven employment areas identified as vulnerable (Charleville-Mézières, Montbéliard, Morlaix, Saint-Dié, Toulon, Valenciennes and Vitré), the experiment was soon extended to thirty sites, and directed this time by an employment centre. It is aimed at employees who had been made redundant for economic reasons by businesses of less than 1,000 employees located in employment areas identified as vulnerable.

The scheme is made voluntary and formalised by signature of a contract. But, unlike other schemes, it “does not strictly mean the supervision of job applicants,” according to Philippe Dole (2010: 18), who was one of its designers. “Members” are in effect students in vocational training. They benefit from a grant of up to one year of occupational transition allowance equivalent to approximately their net salary and also training facilities, as well as the right to work for short periods. Thus, as pointed out by Dole, who compared, in March 2007, the CTP with the “personalized redeployment agreement” (CRP), designed by the social partners in 2005 and for the same redundancy situations: “the objective of the CRP is a rapid return to employment. That of the CTP is the return to sustainable employment, which is a significant difference, with the goal of updating and skills development ... with personalised advice for people, particularly in terms of training.” (L’actualité de la formation, 21 March 2007). Each member undertakes to “be active in their job search” and “to meet his counsellor and regularly communicate to him the results of his actions” (Decree of 14 April 2006). If one believes the figures published by DARES in 2009, the CTP has slightly better results than other support schemes, and particularly the CRP: “13 to 18 months after starting the advisory course, 70% of beneficiaries of CTP and 66% of the beneficiaries of the CRP were employed. Former recipients of CTP are slightly more often in ‘sustainable’ employment, i.e. CDI, CDD or on a temporary contract of 6 months or more, or working as self-employed: 60% against 55% for the former beneficiaries of the CRP” (Bobbio, Gratadour and Zegnani 2009: 2).

Being advised by a single “counsellor” (référent) is both one of the main benefits of the contract and a major constraint to the extent that it requires what are in principle weekly appointments. It is also expected that the member sign a “joint action plan” (PAC) for their job reclassification, and it is
made clear that the contract can be broken. While the CTP cannot be considered in itself as a constraint since membership is a free choice and the only sanction against breach of its obligations is exclusion from the scheme and return to standard conditions of unemployment law, it remains the case, however, that membership involves a relationship with the counsellor that places the latter in a de facto position of judge not only in regards of compliance with the letter and spirit of the contract, but also of developments or blockages in the conversion process and especially of the responsibility of the member for the outcome of his course of training.

BOX 1.–Charleville-Mézières and Morlaix: two contrasting sites

As part of the work of a research group on “expertise about others and the construction of judgement in social magistracies” in four areas (Maisons Départementales du Handicap or Local Disability Organisations, Fonds d’Aide aux Jeunes, or Grants to Help Young People, Prison welfare and work organisations, and the CTP), the analysis here is based on the investigation of two sites, Charleville and Morlaix, chosen for the contrasts they offer. In Charleville-Mézières, the area is strongly influenced by a declining steel industry: collective redundancies follow and the unemployment rate is higher than the national average, and had reached 13.3% in the second quarter of 2006 (against 9.6 % nationally) and 11.7% in the last quarter of 2010 (against 9%). The area saw a sharp rise in late 2006, due to the sudden arrival of 268 employees from Thomé-Génot following the closure of the plant (see below).

By August 31, 2008, the number of memberships accumulated since the start of the experiment amounted to 926 (against 527 in Morlaix during the same period). The project manager joined the team in early 2007. His deputy-manager, hired on a CDD (fixed-term contract) then as temporary staff, was taken on in July 2009. In addition, the scope of the CTP has continued to expand to cover, from June 2009, all of the Ardennes. Whilst in January 2009, 250 members were being counselled in the Charleville-Mézières unit, there were 690 by December of the same year. During the survey, the unit consisted at different times of from 20 to 25 counsellors who had between 6 and 24 months experience. From January 2009 to December 2010, the 1,202 scheme leavers were divided into 433 durable jobs (CDI, CDD or CTT of more than 6 months, entrepreneurship), or 36%; 204 “positive outcomes” (employment in a very short time after release from CTP), or 17%; and 84 leavers for any other reason (including retirement, sick-leave, re-classification as disabled worker, etc.), or 7%; and 481 leavers without definite outcomes, or 40%.

(2) This research group coordinated by Léa Lima is in response to a call for projects by the ANR (Agence Nationale de la Recherche) on social vulnerability.

(3) Brigitte Frotiée (Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique, CNRS-Ens Cachan) also took part in this survey, in particular in the Morlaix area.

Another aspect that underlines the uniqueness of the scheme is based on the rather heterogeneous collection of “counsellors” gathered in CTP cells who have to work together. Indeed, there are advisors from Pôle Emploi (French national employment agency), occupational psychologists from AFPA and, on most sites, consultants employed by private employment firms. Whatever their status, their employer, their experience, their qualifications and specific skills, they all do the same work: counselling thirty members under individual and weekly supervision. It is far from the rationalization put forward by Divay (2011) and the room for maneuver available to counsellors is in this respect exceptional. Several recent studies have been concerned with employment advisors and their practices, paying more or less attention to the schemes in which they are involved (Giuliani 2009; Divay and Perez 2010; Lavitry 2010). By taking seriously the opportunities offered by the experiments with CTP, at least on the initial sites and two of them in particular—Morlaix and Charleville-Mézières (see Box 1)—where we have been conducting a survey by observation and interviews since 2009 (see Box 2), this paper develops and articulates areas often separated in the analysis of social Magistratures and the professionalism of those who are “working on others,” the officers counselling job seekers, in this case redundant workers who have “joined” the CTP.

Morlaix (Brittany), in contrast, is a relatively protected area. The unemployment rate in the area of employment was lower than the national average, being 7.2% in the second quarter of 2006 and 7.7% at the end of 2010. Economic activity is relatively well sustained by tourism and agribusiness. The area covered by the CTP remained unchanged. The project manager and his deputy, in office since the start of the experiment, resisted the invasion of consultants of private employment firms, in a small and relatively stable team of 9 people. On the Morlaix site, there were at most 250 members who were counselled at the same time; from April 2006 to August 2011, there were 1,102 leavers, which was about the same volume of activity as in Charleville-Mézières in 2009-10, which were broken down into 639 durable jobs, or 58%; 156 “positive outcomes,” or 14%; 46 in long term training for a qualification, 15 retirements, 10 resignations, 37 exclusions, 25 maternity and/or long term sickness leaves, 2 deaths, or if they are lumped together in “other reasons,” 12%; and 172 without identified “positive outcomes;” or 16%.

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Counselling activity as a form of judgment, evaluation and interaction with others—terms whose importance was emphasized to understand the functioning of labour markets by researchers such as Bureau and Marchal (see, for example, Bureau and Marchal 2005, 2009; Bureau 2012, Marchal 2012)—lies at the heart of our analysis. The unique expertise of counsellors is in the ways they use, successively or simultaneously, empathy, understanding and objectification throughout their interactions with “members.” After showing the possibilities offered by the scheme, we used the sociology of perception (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995) to study the dominant form of expertise being implemented. Understanding this expertism on the part of counsellors thus involved, as pointed out by Jeannot for example in the afterword to the second edition of the book he dedicated to “fuzzy trades” ([2005] 2011: 157), taking into account the identity, trajectory, and experience of these consultants. And we introduce elements of dispositional sociology to highlight the segmentations that differentiate between agents. Our contribution aims thereby to explain the oscillations in and patterns of forms of expertise, and the profiles and experiences of the “cell” members responsible for implementing the CTP in the areas concerned. Attention to the activity and interactions

BOX 2.–Qualitative methods based on exchanges with the actors

The methods used have combined interviews with national officials of the scheme responsible for its implementation and its evaluation (civil servants of IGAS, DGEFP, DARES, AFPA) and a participant observation survey of the two selected cells. The cell leaders were interviewed several times between March 2009 and March 2011; formal interviews were also conducted with almost all counsellors (n = 26). The meetings and workshops they organise with jobseekers, and the appointments with the members they supervise also resulted in approximately 70 observations. Whenever possible, observations were followed by debriefing interviews with counsellors. Finally, in-depth interviews with members, of those receiving counselling or who have left the scheme, have supplemented these data (n = 21).

Approximately one third of interviews and several observations were conducted with two researchers and the exchange was constant within the research team, but also with actors during formal and informal exchanges. Two seminars were organized with the participation of some of these counsellors in Reims (January 2010) and Paris (September 2010). We have opted not to observe in a totally detached manner, and furthermore we submit our analytic hypotheses regularly to our interlocutors. The investigation then proceeded with a shared reflexivity and dialogue between researchers and counselling professionals. This particular approach has developed both at the request of our partners, who have had the feeling of giving without receiving at the arrival of other visitors, and because of our wish that our research will not only feed academic debate but also may be useful to the actors themselves. It is also based on a desire not to take a superior position and not confine our interlocutors in the position of informers and fully recognize their ability to conceptualise their own practices.
between counsellors and members makes it possible to show how transforma-
tions in norms and conventions of work really operate at the most micro level,
from “employment for life” to “sustainable employability.”

Unemployment rights: from unemployment benefit to counselling
by an “expert”

The right to a “revenu de substitution” (unemployment benefit) during a
period of unemployment is amongst a number of rights that, over time, have
become increasingly asserted to be rights with conditions, and with the accum-
ulation of these conditions and the limitation on the advantages granted “as
of right,” their consequences for the efficacy of basic rights, have meant that
the very meaning of the notion of “right” itself has been questioned.
Conceived in the period of full employment as an insurance against job loss
which could still be considered as an accident of life, it has become increas-
ingly more apparent during a time of mass unemployment as a benefit paid to
an individual considered by the institution as seeking employment, varying
from long-term unemployed person to an unemployed person at the end of
entitlement to benefit. This benefit is therefore no longer essentially under-
stood as compensation for a loss, but as a way to cover periods of unemploy-
ment that increasingly concern an increasingly large number of people. From
this point, evidence of the willingness to find work (or even to reduce or
abandon claims for remuneration or in terms of conditions of employment)
will be more specifically required for the maintenance of the benefit.

It is thus essential to understand this willingness. This assessment is done
through the establishment of a “follow-up” of job seekers, a checking opera-
tion which has its extension and its counterpart in the benefits of “support” of
the applicants identified, from the profiling techniques, such as of those who
are the most “distant” from employment (Debauche and George 2007). Social
inclusion was then added on to employability. The context of its development
thus gives the notion of “support” (towards and even within employment) a
dual function, which involves increasingly wider categories: that of support
(provided by a consultant with the long-term role of job-seeking and training,
but also more generally of being attentive to the personal situation); and the
guardianship of a person presumed incapable of controlling by themselves the
challenges he faces. And it is to meet these objectives that the supervision
becomes “personalized,” even leading to an oxymoronic formulae when
public policies aim to promote a “mass personalised counselling,” which is in
reality only a form of individualized management of the masses. Whatever
the case may be, the role of personalization implies by definition a relatively
thorough knowledge of “personal” issues: since the fitting of support as
closely as possible to needs, as much as close supervision, does not fit well
with categories that are only composed of statistically defined individuals.
Involvement in people’s private lives therefore requires the agent to come out
of a role where he is essentially being asked to implement measures and apply rules, even with humanity and understanding, and engage in the real work of “expertise.” Insofar as the “expert” is in a superior position, it seems that one can speak of “expertise over others;” the agent authenticates people’s problems and the veracity of their efforts to resolve them. If a “fake job-seeker” is detected (and more “false unemployed” are suspected than “fake Rembrandts”), he can be taken off the system or even excluded.

On the seven experimental sites, specific instructions are sent to counsellors in the form of data sheets (Table 1). These are designed to be the vade mecum of the counsellor and divide the counselling process into six phases. The national context of the CTP experiment at the outset required a necessary objectification of judgement whose guarantee is assumed to be based on the technical aspects of the operation.

TABLE 1.–Organisation of the process of directive counselling in the CTP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Average duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 1</strong></td>
<td>Signature of CTP</td>
<td>Individual interview with the project manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 2</strong></td>
<td>Prediagnostic and contractualisation of job-counselling</td>
<td>1 individual interview (formulation of exploratory programme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 3</strong></td>
<td>Exploration of self and environment (1 to 4 weeks)</td>
<td>2 individual interviews (average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 group workshops (average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 telephone follow-up (average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approaches to information and surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short courses on common law (EMT, specialised interviews, visit to training centre, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 4</strong></td>
<td>Development of a new job-finding strategy</td>
<td>1 individual interview (signature of a plan of concerted action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 5</strong></td>
<td>Achievement of new job-finding process (12 months max.)</td>
<td>3 individual or collective interviews/month (average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 telephone follow-up/month (average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Various courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short-term paid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Job-seeking and job application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Production of employment passport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 6</strong></td>
<td>End of CTP</td>
<td>1 appraisal interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>follow-up on the job (6 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Transitioctp.

(6) In this sense, the work is situated in the institutional programme as described by Dubet (2002), and where he notes the decline—we would talk on our side, of changes in this programme rather than decline, both in the field of work on the unemployed, the institutional counsellor, and the checking if not the inculcation (of what it is to be a good unemployed or “employable” person) continue to be important in the activity of categorization and counselling for the unemployed (Demazière 2006).
From stage 2 the counsellor is supposed to establish a “pre-diagnosis” during an initial interview. Very specific instructions are given to him. He is required to organise the interview (expected duration is two hours) in four phases:

1) “Presentation of experience of the recent situation” (the instruction sheet specifies that this phase “must identify” to what extent, and in relation to which aspects, the person is affected by what happens to him and feels ready to ‘bounce-back.’ The counsellor will make reformulations that synthesise this experience to ensure that he understands what is happening to the member and his feelings about it.”);

2) “Expression of expectations about the CTP;”

3) “Projections about occupational futures,” the objective for the counsellor is “to better understand to what point a phase of open exploration (phase 3) might be useful to the member;”

4) “Establishment of an exploratory programme.”

“Identify,” “ensure,” “better understand,” even without stating the concept of “diagnosis,” it is clear that the language employed clearly refers to a form of expertise (in the sense of evaluation or assessment). The fact that the counsellor is provided with tools such as datasheets reinforces this feeling.

The next phase is called “exploration of self and the environment,” and as with phase 4, which is that of the “the interview that concludes the exploration phase and during which an action plan is drawn up” are also strongly framed by instruction sheets that go as far as suggesting how counselling questions can be formulated (“How are you managing with your situation?,” “How do you see your future at the moment?”) and define “a process of exchange” out of which will “emerge a thorough and substantiated diagnosis of the situation.”

The observations we conducted on the two experimental sites show that this willingness to engage in supervision was not always reflected in the activity of the cells: counsellors in both sites and more particularly that of Morlaix, were more or less explicitly encouraged by project leaders and have, in fact, stepped into the breach of personalization and experimention by taking advantage of these concepts and the room for maneuver they allowed. The standardization of the procedure is felt and the desire for control is frequently blurred in favour of listening and support. What could actually have been a form of “expertise on others,” has slipped into “expertise with others.” This is as much to do with the project and the conditions of its feasibility as it is about the ability of this “other” to carry out the task, with a

(7) Bold characters in instruction sheets.
(8) The length and detail of the documents means we cannot present them here in extenso, but the reader may refer to the evaluation report on the scheme which reproduces them in an appendix. See Rémy and Salzberg (2007, annexes 8, 16 and 18).
widely shared tendency to provide a less rather more directive form of training (which would not be expected if one refers to certain practices common today, including those in Pôle Emploi), and thus leads to expertise for others rather than against others.\(^9\) The evaluation is not intended to disqualify the person; their abilities are highlighted and valued as so many “assets” or “strengths” that make it possible to envisage the realisation of even the seemingly most adventurous of plans, and any “brakes” and “weaknesses” are on the contrary only mentioned as obstacles to be overcome by virtue of support (in its dual dimension of moral support and assistance in solving practical problems) or by training; teamwork allows the counsellor to go beyond his limits, including those of his expertise; the institutional constraints themselves, when they are not ignored (instruction sheets, for example, are rarely used) can be circumvented or reinterpreted, and sometimes used in the argument deployed for the “refocusing” of some members, but they never replace the purpose that is represented by the emergence of the desire for retraining and the full exploration of the routes that may lead to it.

The reality of the collective that constitutes the ensemble of counsellors of each cell, under the aegis of the project manager, facilitates the sharing of this benevolent attitude, without denying the personalities of its own members. Thus, on one of the two sites, we have seen the arrival of a counsellor practising an expertise that is somewhat against others. Complaints from several members were taken into consideration by the project manager and other team members, and led her to leave the scheme fairly quickly.

It must be said that the instruction sheets themselves, as they are read, opened the way towards an expertise for others. Thus, for the pre-diagnosis interview, it is specified that during the phase of expression of expectations, “the goal is obviously not here to judge anyone, but to discuss with them what they need to do to optimize the CTP and lead them into employment.” It is this thread—the one that makes the fuzziness a “sociological virtue” as Demazière states (cited in Jeannot, [2005] 2011: XI-XVI)—which has been drawn, the personal experience of counsellors being in this respect, as we shall see, a major element. Because expertise often unfolds through the prism of their own experience, that can help the organization of work, as in Morlaix, where each new member is assigned a counsellor according to their profile. The project manager knows all the counsellors well, but in addition she wants and is able to welcome each new member because of the small size of the site and the number of redundant employees. At Charleville-Mézières on the other hand where there are more job-seekers, people are welcomed in groups and members assigned counsellors according to how full are the portfolios of each professional, and their place of residence, since the cell takes the form of a series of branches spread across the département. But whichever method is used, the expert work that is inherent in this process is shaped by the

\(^9\) On the analysis of the slight slippage between work “on others” to work “with others” that helps to redefine what is social support in social policy, see Astier (2007 and 2009 especially 52-54).
construction of a personal relationship between counsellor and member. This is justified by the magistrative function within which the work of expertise is integrated. Its nature and meaning are thereby doubly modified: firstly, expertise avoids a constant oscillation between judgment and diagnosis that always puts the expert in a superior position, on the other hand, it is necessarily both “on” and “with” others, because from the moment that this other is not being addressed as an individual statistic movable at discretion from one category to another, but as a person endowed with reason and their own will, these interactions are constants.

Counselling/support: understanding as norm and practice

Counsellors have a duty to be understanding, in the same way as the juges de proximité (local magistrates) studied by Weller (2011) have a duty to waver/decide between different solutions. Indeed not only must they be understanding in relation to others to the extent that their occupational backgrounds will vary, but most of all in relation to the members whom they are counselling. This support is in fact based on the construction of judgments akin to a real job. This is based on several types of knowledge and a reflexive use of their own perceptions, which aim to make a fit between the measures practised on and simultaneously made available to members.

Counsellors with a wide range of skills

From the very beginning of the CTP scheme, the decision was made to bring together professionals from a wide range of backgrounds as much in terms of their occupational background or institutional affiliation as their status or seniority. Far from being a body defined by membership, and the reference to common standards and curriculum, they are experts on others because they are put in a position of exercising expertise over others. Within the cells being studied Pôle Emploi advisors coexist with employees (mainly psychologists) of AFPA, seconded by their organizations, to whom must be added, in the case of Charleville-Mézières, some consultants from two private employment organisations (Opérateurs Privés de Placement—OPP). The prevailing feeling is that the former, specialising in counselling and support but also in prospecting for job opportunities amongst firms would be more likely to spontaneously opt for job reclassification, monitoring and

(10) The CTP has thus in some ways anticipated the restructuring of the AFPA in 2009, which saw most of its psychologists (about 800 employees) transferred to Pôle Emploi, the organisation that was itself the result of the merger, from 2008, of ANPE and UNEDIC. From this point of view, the Pôle Emploi staff assigned to the CTP are all former ANPE employees. In contrast, none of the former ASSEDIC, structures specialized in compensation, has consistently been posted since 2009 to the scheme focused on job-coaching.
active assistance in job finding, whereas the second, with their mastery of the complex field of matching job, qualification and skills and their knowledge of the teeming and labyrinthine universe of training, are quite naturally more orientated towards occupational conversion projects, particularly through training. The third group appear more marked in turn by the results culture, and tend to focus on a rapid return to employment via the current state of the labour market rather than the wishes of the people involved. These distinct professional cultures and positions, which could affect the forms of expertise practiced, were visible at the beginnings of the scheme and emphasised by project managers who were trying to build a “common CTP culture,” but seem to have become less pronounced over time. Routine work, group actions and meetings help people to get to know each other and recognise the contributions made by others, as well as the specificity of work in this scheme, and this means that over the course of several weeks they will all tend to turn to colleagues with different skills when they need them. Ultimately, this is how a real pooling of skills emerges, as well as a particular professionalism, unique to the CTP, as shown in the comments of a consultant:

The boss tries to instill a common culture, compared to the availability, the prediagnostic ... the way you ratify the plan. No matter where you come from, the ratification of the plan goes through the same stages.

Knowledge and practice of expertise: finding matches

The expertise of counsellors is in many ways similar to that discussed by Bessy and Chateauraynaud (1995). “Members,” workers who have been made redundant, enter the scheme with very varied expectations that go from a total lack of any career plan because of their inability to see any future for themselves to a plan that is already fully formed and presented as a “turnkey” to the counsellor who only has to register it. The task of the counsellor is then to assess those members considered to be “project leaders,” the “porteurs de projets,” in other words to assess to what extent the member is committed to his plan so as to identify the place he will take in the job market and the tools needed to get him that place. Like the auctioneers studied by Bessy and Chateauraynaud, counsellors have a “pivotal” role and help define the nature and type of the career plan. But whereas the estimating work of auctioneers “deals with the body of the object,” the career plan has no body and it is thus the body of the member—the project leader—that will be involved: his way of speaking, of self-presentation, of behaving. This distanced body-to-body relationship that works mainly through the senses without direct contact (sound, sight and smell) uses the skills of common sense. Although perception is at the heart of the counsellors work it is not the only vector of lay skills. Practical skills used in everyday life are also employed. However the process by which the career plan is defined and assessed is also based on

(11) On the voice as part of the body, see Le Breton (2011).
more formalised skills that allow the specific plan to be located in relation to
general categories tied to knowledge about the labour market, training facili-
ties, etc. These expert skills are based on different types of resources provided
by the employer, by the scheme and even by “biographical” type resources
that belong to the counsellor such as his own training and occupational
experience.

The counsellors’ professionalism, their expertise, is to know how to use
the right resources to make good matches. The notion of “matching,” “means
precisely the encounter between a set of categories and material properties,
identifiable by the (assumed) common meanings or instruments of objectifica-
tion” (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1992: 105). Thus it is indeed expertise “on”
or “with” others insofar as its object is the member as “project leader” and
where counselling consists of creating good matches which will lead to the
most successful possible re-entry into the labour market, as evidenced by this
discussion between a counsellor and a member, facing the observer, which
made it possible to “take stock” by talking about the nature of the work of
counselling as a form of narrative.

Dominique: (12) “The aim written on the information sheet was: quick return to employ-
ment, or shift to training as a nursing auxiliary. This was an initial thought. M. worked as a
secretary. The principle focus is 1) the professional experience, redundancy does not inte-
rest me much at first. And tomorrow? M. wants to become a nursing auxiliary. What if she
got on another training course: as a medical-psychological auxiliary (AMP). Why? Be-
cause I work with AFEIH (Association pour la Formation, l’Emploi et l’Insertion des Per-
sonnes Handicapées–Association for Training, Employment and Integration of Disabled
People) at R. and I know they are likely to recruit AMPs. The question is why a nursing
auxiliary? What are the job opportunities, in what organisation?
M.: On my side, I also went looking for information. I have a friend who is a career and a
friend who is a nursing auxiliary. Even before my dismissal, I had found out about it.
I wanted to contact people.
Dominique: We use the information provided plus the opportunities. The GRETA came to
the CTP to communicate AMP training and the problems which are related to how this job
is seen. There is some preparation work: training records, requirements and prerequisites
... and M. told me she had cared for a dependent relative. Helping a close relative to wash
is one thing but how about doing it for a stranger? We had a think around the craft and
skills being imagined. It was based on what I have been told by the GRETA and AFEIH.
There has been time for this to sink in. I spoke to you about willingness, someone who af-
ter fifteen days of membership in the scheme said: “It’s weird they have not yet got back to
me,” that is rare! This may reflect a desire to take care of somebody. ... To move from
nurse-auxiliary, to AMP, is this wrong, a mistake? The CTP is an airlock. Do I have a life
plan, a career plan? Some go fast, some members, I discovered them after seven months...
what do they have left? Afterwards, a career plan, it is not hard. Service jobs will increase,
there are structures, you have been involved in the maintenance of a body, so there are op-
portunities: GRETA, the AFEIH and the care homes. We gathered the ingredients for a
plan to be put together. We know that there are periods of immersion, we know that there
are needs. We must think about the probability of getting taken on for a job at the end of
training. This should be taken into account for internships, and not only ones that are close
gographically. All the ingredients are there for following a training course.”

(12) Names of counsellors have been changed.

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Here, the consellor himself indicates how he works. He gathers facts that provide him with information about the member’s career plan (via the registration form filled out by members at the signing of the contract) on personal and/or occupational experience relating to this plan (she had looked after a dependent elderly person in her entourage), on the ideas she had about the job and what it is based (the people around her that may do the same work) and on her motivation (calling the secretary of the CTP fifteen days after joining is not common). He knows, moreover, that a training organization is looking for interns for something similar and he has assessed the skills of M. in the light of those expected by the organization.

He was aware of schedules and also knows she could quickly enter training in this framework. He knows the job opportunities in the local area because for twenty years he was responsible for relations with companies at Pôle Emploi (the employment centre) and has, therefore, a very full address book allowing him to guide her in the choice of training sites. In addition, his knowledge of the area is based on his family ties within it, a commitment to and a strong curiosity about what happens in the département, which made him an expert in the field and one recognized as such by his colleagues. He worked to develop the initial career plan based on some of its salient features (working in care for people, a desire to complete the plan without delay, job opportunities) in order to keep everything together whilst translating them into a new plan acceptable to the member.

In other situations counsellors are less openly involved but suggest tasks for the member to carry out that will help him to understand and assess his career plan.

Mr. D. comes for his third visit. He wants to start a business and wavers between two types of activity: photovoltaics, that he seems to favour, or a decoration company. In a previous appointment, Virginie suggested he take a course in setting up a business to evaluate the project and determine his training needs. He describes the various stages through which he passed and the various contacts encountered during this course.

Virginie: “What did you think of all that? Do you feel ready?
Monsieur D.: Well, I’ve got another idea. What I’d really like to do is not that. I’m sticking with my first idea, decoration, stickers. This is what I could do! [Monsieur D. brings out a book full of photos of paintings that he had done on cars, motorcycles, helmets, etc.]
It would be a shame not to use it!
Virginie: If you can combine passion and job, this is happiness.
Mr. D.: There is no brake on it, no limits!
Virginie: You draw really well! You have a talent...
Mr. D.: It would be a shame not to use it! I like electricity but I prefer this. I’m going back to see the person I told you about, who makes advertising panels to see if we can do something together.
Virginie: Well, we’ll put it [photovoltaics] on one side! We’ll work on the other thing! Even if you say no to training immediately, it does not prevent you coming back to it later. You tell me... the two interviews we had together, you’ve not talked about it any more... If [photovoltaics] I think you have talked to me about it more to reassure yourself. Here you may have a little more fear because it is a project dear to your heart. Some market research, you can conduct it yourself without necessarily doing any training. We have to work also on your personal constraints beyond the département. Maybe you need to be ready to move, for you to see what capabilities you may have in commercial matters. Of course we’ll keep on with training in office and financial work.
Mr. D.: I’d like to see what’s possible in wall decoration.
Virginie: What do you mean by wall decoration?
Mr. D.: Frescoes and all that.
Virginie: Are there companies that do this?
Mr. D.: Yes, even in C. There is X. and... the car I always see...
Virginie: There is a restaurant up at the square in D. with a fresco painting on it... You want to paint on what?
Mr. D.: All over!
Virginie: Do you need training?
Mr. D. Maybe...
Virginie: There is a school in R. which does that, school B. [She connects to the site of the school which is an institute of decorative painting, she navigates in the site with Mr. D. and shows him things.] We need to contact them to see if they have training modules for adults. I honestly do not know. Maybe we can do only a few modules. You call, you go there, you take your book, you explain your career plan. We need to see depending on what exactly you want, maybe it is only school stuff... Maybe there is the possibility of joining some courses.
Mr. D.: I’ll go and see.”

In the course of this observation, Virginie did not intervene directly in M. D’s career plan. He wants to start his own company but he had talked about two career plans. She has confidence in him, and sees him as someone who has “his feet on the ground.” Moreover, in the first part of the interview, he recounts in some detail what happened during the course on new business start-up: who he met, when, for how long, the reflections it has aroused in him. In doing so, he shows his seriousness towards his counsellor, who can, in turn, rely on an external evaluation. This leads Mr. D. to reconsider things and decide firmly for decoration, so much so that for the first time, he brings his book to inform the counsellor of his expertise in the field. This book serves as a guarantee: there are enough pictures to prove on the one hand that it is not a fad, but an activity carried out for a long time, and secondly that many customers appreciate his work and thus validate its quality. The counsellor then began to ask him questions about his knowledge of available career opportunities, then tells him that she knows about them as well. Her surprising responsiveness about training in the art school—this type of training is not common knowledge in the CTP—is explained when, at the end of the observation, she tells us that... her brother-in law studied at this school. On so many aspects then, she also uses her personal knowledge.

Thus we see the stages through which, during the course of the interaction, matches are made, and supported by the opinions of other professionals and clients: —the book, the determination of Mr. D. (re) tested about the opportunity to take courses in school B. (“You call, you go and see them.”), which will also make it possible to have another opinion on the talent of Mr. D. from someone in the arts, then to go—via training—from a subjective impression to a certification objectified by a degree or diploma, are the many elements which, combined with the examination of possible job opportunities, are involved in the assessment of a career plan, which thus seems to deserve to be supported, with training still to be defined prior to re-entry into the labour market.
Engagement and influence: how to trust (or not)

The “approval of the career plan” can, in certain situations, be similar to a judgment about authenticity: are we dealing with members who are really committed to finding a job, as stipulated by the terms of the contract they have signed, or with “fraudsters?” For most counsellors, this issue is central and determines their involvement in coaching. The judgment of authenticity focuses on the issue of trust and counsellors are picking between “good” and “bad” members. A “good” member is the one who can be trusted, who invests in his career plan, who has his “head firmly on his shoulders,” like Mr. D., but also one who “plays the game.” This is the case for those who signed on to the CTP within a few quarters of their retirement age and who everyone knows will not find sustainable employment, but who are willing to come to appointments and act “as if.” As one counsellor put it:

Take the example of this lady, she is 57 years old, she did not want to start all over again and wants to make a request to be re-classified as a disabled worker... I’m not going to bother myself over that lady. It’s human! But at age 30, I think you’re not there to stay at home and draw your wages!

The “portfolio” of each counsellor and the whole group of all the members who have gone through and are passed by the cell thus resemble a “collection.” Each new member is inserted into the set and is appraised, both for himself, according to his own merits and in relation to the whole.

Members who cannot be trusted, however, are those “who are not in the real world,” who tread water, who are indecisive or who are suspected of enjoying a little too much in the way of financial benefits from a scheme that is considered too generous by some counsellors. This distinction between good and bad members is the most common view of the counsellors. It is also a very old attitude in social work that is reminiscent of the recommendations of Joseph-Marie de Gérando in _Le visiteur du pauvre_ ([1820] 1990). It is also a well-known position regarding job-coaching for the unemployed in local employment agencies (Benarrosh 2000). As the excerpt shows that compared members nearing retirement with the young, the triage process is based on both a test of “recruitability”—a neologism that focuses on recruitment practices of employers as much as on the individual employability of the job-seeker (Pochic 2007)—and on how the member assumes the role expected of him.

Depending on whether trust is granted or not, the level of commitment of the counsellor is not the same. In the absence of trust, support is limited to formal requirements. The counsellor does his work in scrupulous accordance with the rules. For example Marina says this about a member who had sought the help of a député (member of the French parliament)—and inappropriately according to her—to promote his application for training:

Here, there is clearly a problem of trust, and ... it is clear that since then I have been wary. I do not know what he will think of what I say. I am on the defensive. I have met him every week, but I’m suspicious. ... I will see him again in April for a short interview,
but that’s all. There is nothing more that I can do. Especially with what happened. We will set up the training and its follow-up, but I’m not going to be chasing after him.

It is a matter of evading the influence of the members. The challenge is all the more important since, as we will see, the counsellors involved themselves to a high degree in the counselling and job-coaching process. Where there is repeated failure on the part of a member, it may lead to a warning and then exclusion. In contrast, when trust is gained, the counsellor may mobilize his networks and bend the rules.

Marina has no hesitation in making a case for a training application in situations that might seem a priori rather audacious, such as in the case of Mr. B., an environmental technician in the Ardennes who is wishing to become a scriptwriter. It is this scenario that is predominant and appears to be the standard for counselling in the scheme being studied.

**Understanding counselling as self-work**

The professionalism that emerges and which is common to our various experts lies in their ability to adjust their attitudes and ways of working to the person they have in front of them and to the situation. Because it is from within themselves that the counsellors find the resources to draw on that are required by this expertise. Expertise on others goes hand in hand with and is based on a “self-work” (Vrancken and Macquet 2006), which is never completed, as the face-to-face interviews with members constantly confirm, and which help to feed and consolidate knowledge from both personal and professional experience. The experience is indeed a powerful engine of expertise, as evidenced by this exchange between two consultants:

Martine: “For some members, OK [you must write things down] because you must formalize things a bit, because the CTP is a bit of a milk-cow. With some, it rolls along so well we do not need this document.

Christine: It’s true that sometimes the feeling...

Martine: Often we feel things, with experience, we can feel it if he is taking us for a ride... but that is something we cannot write down in the PAC,(13) We know well enough who we can do something with and those with whom we can’t.

Christine: After a few months, you get a feeling for it. It is... isolated behaviours, interviews, the feedback from approaches, if there are any or not... There, if we feel they are taking us for a ride, we tighten the noose. Take the example of a guy, he worked for eight months on the black, it dragged on... I put him on a mandatory scheme, and within a fortnight he had set up his own company.

Martine: It is in the conversation.

Christine: It is not written down.”

“The feeling,” “our experience,” “one feels,” “one suspects”… These are the sentiments of the counsellor, his reactions, his emotional feeling about the member, or his behaviour, or his speech which are used to assess and judge members. It is by working on themselves to identify their own emotional

(13) Plan d’Action Concerté (Concerted action plan).
situation in the interaction that the counsellors are doing their advisory work, by adjusting their take on the situation and giving them confidence or, conversely, “in tighten [ing] the noose” and engaging the member in new tests. That is, in their eyes, an essential resource. As Valli, Martin and Hertz have emphasized, officers “must personalize themselves in the same way as they personalize their interlocutors, thus combining both institutional role and professional identity in the productive magma that is ‘the feeling’” (2002: 230).

This is knowledge that is difficult to explain, almost incommunicable, which helps to progress from feelings to skills. It is very difficult to obtain explicit answers on this subject, as seen in the exchange transcribed above or in this excerpt from an interview with another counsellor:

> Anything that is not real, you’re bound to feel it. There are people, you know you’ll be able to trust them. You feel it, sometimes you feel it. Sometimes it is better to try to say things, or at least try so that they understand themselves.

It can be seen how this process slides imperceptibly but effectively from feeling to knowledge and to a particular form of support. These expressions, although barely explicit, are the subject of a manifest and solid agreement between the counsellors. Based on their experience and feelings, counsellors therefore adjust the type of support which they are engaged in with the member, ranging from understanding to objectification when some redirection is necessary.

The fact that this type of expertise ultimately appears as the “norm” of the experiment is a sign that what it means to customize the support that the CTP claims to develop in the contexts that we have observed, is being taken seriously. This seriousness is seen firstly in the reflexivity of counsellors—the ability to take a critical look at their own practices, to question the meaning of their work, their choices, their ways of behaving in relation to members—which, according to our observations, are clearly expressed in an interview situation.

It is noteworthy how this reflexivity and regime of understanding are rooted in collective practices favoured by the conditions and the working environment, as well as by the modes of regulation of cell activity largely inspired, as it seems to us, by the project managers. It is indeed they who have the task of welding the group together, or at least of maintaining group dynamics, if not to play with the different dimensions that are likely to fragment it so as to ensure that complementarities and possible cooperations are activated. Thus, in both cells, regular meetings (usually weekly) of the whole team are organized by the project managers. They take many forms and have different effects, but in that within the smallest and most stable of the cells, that of Morlaix, the hierarchical configuration is less apparent and challenges to its guidance and direction are fewer. Although regulated collectively, this understanding attitude leaving plenty of room for the subjectivity of the expert and his perception comes in a variety of forms, situations and interactions, and thrives on the personal and professional experience of the counsellors. Thus, differences emerge. In fact, not all the counsellors have the same experience: not even the same training or similar types of earlier career, as

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well as different employers who imposed varying constraints. In some cases, life events of a personal nature can also intervene and influence their professional attitude. It is these aspects that we will now consider, and examine how, despite a relatively homogeneous way of working, they can differ.

**Forms of expertise and experience**

If the shared expertise and know-how of counsellors, in short their professionalism, lies in their ability to take into account the diversity of members, to adjust to the person they have in front of them, and adapt to situations during the course of counselling, it is also found in the regularities and variations which are not only related to interactions with people being counselled. Although there are few of them, there are quite clearly some counsellors who are more likely to resort to the objectification and systematic testing of members, even if for the most part they slip into a more understanding form of counselling. The ways of working of these “experts on others” in the CTP cells may vary depending on the institutional affiliation, employment status, counsellor careers, or the professional principles that they use (or may formalize) as well as the collective modes of regulation involved in the local counselling situation, and it is up to the observer to unravel it all.

There are in fact three main versions of experience that can be used to develop configurations to explain these variations. Seniority in the profession or in a post is a first structural dimension, contrasting “old timers” and “newcomers.” Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, it is the course of employment that must be taken into account. We can differentiate between, on one side the “protected,” often employed in the public service in especially stable jobs, and on the other the “insecure CTP” who work on temporary public service contracts, or some consultants in the OPPs, who have often combined odd jobs and frequently have an experience shared with members: that of being made redundant. Finally, the structure of the CTP cell, the vagaries of its operations and how its project managers use their own personal and professional experience are not without influence.

**“Old timers” versus “newcomers”**

One of the important dimensions of previous career experience is seniority in the position: thus we find commonalities between, on the one hand, advisors who were already in this role before reaching the CTP, whatever their organizational membership, and on the other, those who have discovered the role when they took up their job in the cells. The first show important similarities with other “experts” in social work, as in the Maisons Départementales du Handicap, the Fonds d’Aide aux Jeunes or the Commissions d’Insertion et de Probation: what these professionals have in common is that they are
holders of recognized knowledge and experience, on which they base the “expertise” expected of them. The experience of counselling allows them to be generally at ease in their relationships with the members, and to be casual about protocols and datasheets. Among the “experienced” there is a distinction between the agents of Pôle Emploi and consultants in the OPPs. For those who had previously worked for ANPE and who had sometimes acted as the “resistance” in their agency (openly and as trades unionists, or marginally and secretly), the CTP represented nothing less than a framework enabling them to seamlessly perform their business as they understood it and come back, as they understood it themselves to the “heart of the job.” Often, the writings of these agents, people more comfortable in a verbal situation, are minimal in order to avoid harm to the member.

**Rosa: A trained counsellor**

After studying biology and languages and a period of unemployment “by choice,” Rosa had to return to work when her husband found himself unemployed before dying. She thought about the IUFM then decided to be a social worker and has passed the final examination to be a counsellor for the ANPE (1991). She worked especially in local unemployment offices (*points relais*), small structures with a degree of autonomy that she liked. But when she was assigned to monthly personal monitoring work (“tracking control”), with a portfolio of 180 people, she said: “It is no longer worthwhile, it no longer had any interest... it was the machine and hierarchy... It is not my sort of job, if I wanted to be a cop, I’d have joined the police.”

She joined the CTP cell, which reminds her of how she wanted to work: with autonomy, the ability to organize her own work, involvement with the applicant (“trying to get somewhere together”). She appreciates teamwork. However, she qualifies this: “There is such a discrepancy in relation to what happens in the employment centre (Pôle Emploi) that I cannot talk to my colleagues and I feel both guilty and privileged.”

Rosa, who is a union member, is worried: “I fear 2011, because I will have to return to this horror called Pôle Emploi ... We are counsellors (according to the collective agreement and salary slip), but the term ‘counselling’ has disappeared: we are job-finders or dole-payers on the job description ... It’s worse than being a cop, it’s like being a warden with the power we have over the prisoner.”

This profile is found more especially in the CTP because these agents are recruited on a voluntary basis. However, for some experienced practitioners in job-finding, imbued with the culture of the “private sector” (from the time when the “culture of results” was the prerogative of the sector), the scheme may seem to be “too generous” or even “ineffective, at least for a majority of members,” the place allotted to counselling being excessive in their eyes and taking them away from their normal practices. To them, the work is actually quite routine: “we quickly made the rounds” or “you’re bored.”
commonly have to use various control documents and circumstantial evidence, such as time-sheets, engagement letters, written reports, formal job assignments, detailed written reports, to justify their work with their employer when it is required of them, as is the case for one of the two OPP, as procedures for detailed reporting.

They are closer to the “newcomers” (often young), who learned their trade in the CTP (some have even discovered it as members themselves) and are more likely to rely on the instruction cards available to them or the PAC, or even the lists of instructions summarizing the tasks to be completed at the end of each interview: and writing things down is reassuring for them.

**Léonie: A devalued degree and little experience**

Holder of a Masters of Occupational Psychology degree, Léonie has worked on a series of temporary contracts (CDD) since the beginning of her occupational life, five years ago. She works on a temporary contract for the AFPA. But she says: “I do not have any software... nothing... my contacts with AFPA are very infrequent. I’m a little cut-off from the AFPA. My manager has not seen me for a year...”

She is one of the few counsellors, who on starting on the CTP, received an introductory work-schedule for three weeks, allowing her to attend workshops, watch some two-person interviews and to study background documentation. Unsure of herself, she lacks self-confidence and maintains an emotional tie to work: reassured when “her” members find work, blaming herself when they don’t. About the word expert, she says: “The word is strong, ‘expert,’ but you cannot be perfect. Otherwise, you would have 100% success!”

For her, an expert is “someone who knows everything about everything, all the training, all businesses, the local market, who is able to take off the brakes on each person.”

She conducts very formal interviews, based rigidly on the paperwork to be placed in the file, relying on the rules, dates, documents available as safeguards.

As seen in the case of Léonie, some of these newcomers to the trade have a high level of training (one of the OPPs always recruits from bac + 5 applicants, and in particular those who have just been awarded a Masters of Psychology degree). Recourse to the written record is perhaps for them inherited from their education, although this attitude does not exclude reference to the importance of “feeling,” which everybody requires and is widely recognized as a component of expertise. The attitude we call understanding can be defined as one that leaves as much as possible free during the interaction, and is thus as transversal to typologies as the various encounters can be. More professional experience supports this, however, and especially helps with the claim, insofar as it promotes development away from strict compliance with professional norms... as with any “expert!”
Stable versus unstable: the experience of redundancy and “having been there”

All counsellors are striving to consolidate their counselling work by basing it on a form of expertise adjusted as far as possible to the situations and persons considered. Yet not all of them use the same experiences to this end: the previous careers of counsellors are in this respect an important factor. If some are, as we have seen, able to rely on their mastery of professional practices, others are more inclined to legitimize their expertise, compared to that of the long-term professionals in job-finding, in their own experience of occupational disruptions, which introduces an element that brings them in some ways closer to the members. Indeed, a number of counsellors have experienced ups and downs: a number of short-term contracts (CDD), one or more redundancies, periods of unemployment. Four of them (three in Charleville and one in Morlaix) have even got experience of the CTP as members. The community of experiences from which they derive an intimate knowledge of the situation faced by members allows them to claim a special knowledge “we have experience of being made redundant, where the people from Pôle Emploi have not” one counsellor told us, who had been a CTP member. In reality, the real caesura is not between those working for Pôle Emploi and the others, but between those who have experienced unemployment, CDD, insecurity, loss of employment or the need to work away from home, and all the other possibilities: several Pôle Emploi people are in fact working on contracts or have themselves experienced job insecurity before they passed the concours (examination) to obtain their post.

### Agnès: A temporary employee talks to others

Agnès lives in a small village with her husband, a craftsman bricklayer. She has had a chequered experience of work: she worked for eight years, and has never had a single CDI (permanent contract), but only alternated CDD and periods of unemployment, mostly very short because she accepts all the jobs she finds. She has the distinction of being a counsellor on two different occasions for the CTP, on a CDD, firstly as a détaché of Pôle Emploi, then at the AFPA. She arrived on the CTP by chance, when she had simply applied for a CDD at Pôle Emploi by chance: “I knew nothing about Pôle Emploi, nothing about getting people into work. We were just given the text of the legislation. The integration was very difficult, I said to my colleague: ‘I do not know if I’ll stay.’”

For her, and unambiguously, “the goal of CTP is the job.” She claims a professionalism based on her varied personal experiences and more particularly that of job-insecurity. Thus, for her, the “culture of the CTP” is “make do but get a move on!” She says: “Sometimes we have no choice, it was a bit like being a teacher ... Sometimes, I tell them: ‘I’m giving you your homework.’ I do not tell everyone... I’m trying to fit it to the person in front of me. With young people of 24 who have the impression that I am their friend, I’ll be more wicked.”

.../...
She believes that one of the qualities necessary to do her job is to “be fairly rigorous, able to detect in a person whether she is laughing at us or not.” She says, “I will certainly not be involved in getting people into work all my life, it’s tiring. In my insecure situation where I am, to have people who complain all the time... I try to show them that they are lucky to have this scheme... I tell them that everybody goes through unemployment, that I have been through it, that I may go through it again... Sometimes I want to say that I also do not know what I will do in six months, but I don’t tell them that.”

Ultimately, she believes: “The CTP can help people when people want it to. But they should have a salary decreasing over time. This is what is a block on it working. People can say: ‘I can have a good year’s salary, I’m not going to try to find work.’”

That experience is used during interviews with members to encourage them to overcome the shock of their dismissal and get the best out of their situation. It is to defuse anger and vindictiveness, to accept the dismissal as a hiccup, as something which is after all very normal. These counsellors offer themselves as living examples of a possible change of career:

“I had a dismissal for misconduct,” says another counsellor. “Refusal to change and redundancy: I know what I’m talking about and I know how they feel. After my retraining, I had a skills assessment, job inquiry, I tried to negotiate EMT, this is what they ask of us as members. Following the EMT, I got the contract with B. [the second OPP], this counsellor position, I’ve been there and it paid off.”

It should be noted that community experience, far from leading directly to empathy every time, can produce, as in the case of Agnès, a more demanding or even harder attitude vis-à-vis members: whether this is a simple defence against the influence that a process of too great an identification can confer on the member, the observation sometimes tinged with pride that we have “been there” and been released from it, or simply an intransigence gained during the ordeal. The willingness for objectification that results can be mitigated or on the contrary enhanced, as we were able to see in the study sites, depending on the mood of the work group in which it was expressed.

The job-insecurity experienced by some consultants also accentuates the gap between on the one hand officials of Pôle Emploi, more likely to think in terms of rights, and other contractual workers or employees of the OPP’s on “CDI de mission (permanent contracts),” who are more influenced by neo-liberal conceptions of the labour market. Various statutes are not without effect on the ideas that counsellors have about work and employment and, in

(14) Évaluations en Milieu de Travail (Workplace Assessments).

(15) Including the right to strike, that they use on the contrary to their colleagues who see it as incongruous.

(16) Contracts that the employer can legally break if the business on which the job is based is lost, for example if the CTP stops or if the project manager decides not to renew the contract with a given OPP.
the first place, on notions such as mobility, or the “sustainable employability” that CTP seeks to make operational. Again, different trends coexist: the “insecure CTPs” (especially young people, who consider it normal to start with short-term contracts, in order to gain experience and try out various jobs)\(^{(17)}\) have little hesitation in praising the value of short-term contracts to the members and to emphasize the need to find a job (even if he will have to lower his requirements or make costly or lengthy trips), placing this not only in the field of contractual obligation, but also that of the realism being displayed (“this is how it works today”) or the best interests (the need to find a job to extend his rights). This assumed distancing of the moods of the member is both a bulwark against influence and the claim for an objective consideration of a new state of the labour market, marked by a succession of jobs, rather than something organised by the internal markets of large companies where you have to stay for twenty or more years. In so doing, they actively contribute to change in the conventions of work and participate in the attempt to make its insecurity acceptable as a new standard. Paradoxically, however, training—more than the direct return to work, at least in the first stage of the counselling process—which may be preferred by these insecure counsellors as the key is, in their eyes, to have qualifications to be able to bounce from job to job. But it is also the willingness for adaptation of this type of “neo-Darwinian” counsellor that encourages them to look for strings to pull in the background and personality of their members, or even sometimes to face rejection or what the language of CTP commonly called “brakes” or “weak points.” Objectifying aims thus tend to reinforce the commanding position with an intensification of the requirement for everything to be written down, the multiplication of requirements, verification of compliance through a series of milestones, establishment of a system of tests and proofs, etc.

One could say that in general it is more the appropriation by each person, in his own way, of his experience and the conditions of exercise of his work that affect professional practice: more than the career itself, the feelings produced by this career; more than institutional belonging (to Pôle Emploi, the AFPA or an OPP), the feeling of belonging shaped by the requirements and principles about evaluation of each of these institutions,\(^{(18)}\) but also links such as union membership.

In the end, added to these very personal aspects is a collective dimension referring to both the history of the CTP cell in each area and the personality

\(^{(17)}\) This is what appeared in their conversations at the beginning of the survey—when they had been there two or three months—but this tone changed as the survey progressed, which was also a progression for them towards the end of the contract. The prospect of a change to a CDI or a permanent post, promised or hoped, tends to recede at the mercy of rumours in the light of the experience of colleagues with similar employment status who had gone before them.

\(^{(18)}\) By contrast with AFPA staff, those of Pôle Emploi have to fill in tables and files using a specific software programme.
of the project leader, which creates a particular local configuration (Brun et al. 2012).

The impact of local configurations

Indeed, whilst the two cells we studied are similar in many ways, the ethos is more strongly about understanding in Morlaix, and laced with objectification in Charleville-Mézières. This is due, we believe, to how the collective—the CTP cell—was formed and structured over time. Charleville was marked from this point of view, by the massive protest by employees of Thomé-Génot at the end of 2006. To try to break up a long and difficult dispute, the State made the payment of severance pay conditional on membership of the CTP. At the time, the cell, which had only four counsellors, experienced the arrival of 268 new members, furious at having been forced out and whose counselling was necessarily delayed... This perversion of the scheme supposed to be joined on a voluntary basis coloured the reputation of the CTP in the region, seen by the unions as an instrument of social peace. In addition, the closing of Thomé-Génot had several twists, including at the judicial level. The company became Ardennes-Forges following a takeover, some former employees returned to their old factory and the employer received thanks to the CTP subsidies on workstations for widening skills. Unfortunately, this second rogue boss quickly put the key under the door without in the least extending the skills of its employees and in their great anger, employees included a CTP counsellor in their prosecution for fraud, thus reinforcing the bad reputation of the scheme. The local newspaper, L’Union-L’Ardennais did not miss any opportunity to attack it, including using false or exaggerated reports. For example, the highly critical report of the Conseil Économique, Social et Environnemental on the retraining cells (Ramonet 2010), which does not refer at all to the CTP cells, was the subject of an article entitled “CTP: 4/20.” Today, virtually no counsellor has counselled previous Thomé-Génot employees—the turnover of counsellors has been considerable over the last five years—but the memory of this conflict has had a lasting negative impact on the climate in which the project manager has attempted to avoid trouble, including ensuring the balance of attitudes between understanding and objectification. It is also one of the reasons why he pushes his counsellors to greater use of tools such as the PAC, attendance sheets and letters of assignment to allow a rationale of proof in cases of appeal on the part of the member.

(19) On the conflict at Thomé-Génot, see the blog of the association of ex-workers (http://atg-association.overblog.com/) run by Charles Rey, who has collected all of the press reports that appeared on it. See also the film by Marcel Trillat, Silence dans la vallée. See also Pinçon (1985, 1987).
At Morlaix, on the other hand, observation reveals the more collective nature of the work of the cell. Context (the team is smaller, more stable, assembled in one place) is combined here with the philosophy of a charismatic project leader and his deputy. Consensus is expressed by the predominance of a conscious attitude of trust, based on the value of the member, and generally by opening up a wide range of career prospects in the first interview: they give themselves the time necessary to define the range of possibilities, and much more, if necessary, than the four weeks envisaged under the national framework for the self-and-environment exploration phase. It aims to give the member concrete benchmarks and bring him back, if necessary, to reality, but in taking care to incorporate the strength of his motivations and sometimes his various constraints amongst the hallmarks of success. Often, several career-plans are monitored simultaneously. PACs are signed only when the counsellor thinks the ways ahead are sufficiently clear. Return to sustainable employment is certainly in line of sight, but it is the notion of “reassurance about the journey” (discussed more in terms of biographical journey than simple career) on which there is consensus. The refusal to use an OPP, adjudged to be not sufficiently professional according to this concept of counselling, and too dependent on a philosophy of “outcomes,” as well as resistance to the extension of the area are clearly part of a fundamental attachment to a humanist approach going far beyond that of the institutions carrying out public policy on employment.

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Expertise and experience... what are the implications?

The scheme and how the project managers we have encountered have promoted and shaped it have produced an expertise for the counsellors that is both personalised (adapted to the people being counselled) and very personal (unique to each counsellor). The use of experience poses, from this point of view, a number of questions, particularly with regard to the effect of the profile of the counsellors. If we go back to the genesis of the scheme, the use of heterogeneous profiles for counsellors must be seen as an attempt to renovate counselling practices. Indeed, the CTP is based on previous experiments conducted in the département of Nord, led by Philippe Dole, then the Director of Labour for the département. The CTP germinated in the soil of a particular ARMELL programme (support, retraining, redeployment in Lille), an experimental scheme implemented between December 2003 and December 2006, and designed to promote the return to work of employees made redundant by firms in the district of Lille (interview with Philippe Dole, June 15, 2009). For this scheme, Dole had turned for help to a former union leader in the textile industry of the Lille conurbation whose factory had closed and whom he had known at that time (Steyaert 2005). The pre-experiment before the
experiment had been mounted around a particular counsellor profile of someone who had experienced occupational difficulties but who was also strongly involved in collective action (Rémy and Salzberg 2007: 4). In the CTP, this type of profile is evident in many ways, although union involvement is less apparent. Several project managers recruited to pioneer CTP cells on seven historic sites (including those of Charleville-Mézières and Morlaix) had this feature of having experienced for themselves non-linear occupational careers, as noted in the midterm evaluation report by inspectors from IGAS: “[The] profiles [of project managers] are very different, their career and their professional worlds also; road transport, IT, retail, accounting... even if some elements are widely shared: wide experience, periods in the private sector, sometimes as entrepreneur. Many have also experienced situations of unemployment.” (Rémy and Salzberg 2007: 4). It’s the same for the counsellors. The use of experience may also coincide with a real aversion to collective action and protest. “Protest” is indeed a negative label in the mouths of some of these counsellors, non-union, non-strikers, accustomed to insecurity—insecurity in their careers, their contracts, the insecurity of the scheme itself, renewed from year to year, or even from month to month... For them, the collective struggle is a probably a commitment from another time, in any case one without real meaning. Already, whatever the form of expertise adopted by the counsellor, the issue of the labour collective, subordination, and possibly in the case of layoffs or plant closures, the collective struggle, is located outside the frame of counselling. But the depoliticization and desocialization of the challenges posed by redundancy seem reinforced by the experience of insecurity which tends to be as defined as the norm by counsellors who invoke it when listing their own experience.

If we see the CTP in the wider context of the law on the programme for social cohesion of January 2005, which multiplies the stakeholders and ends the monopoly of Pôle Emploi regarding support for the unemployed, one can make the hypothesis that the change in profile of employment counsellors, now called référents, when articulated with the growing importance of the individual relationship with beneficiaries is an important development, over and above the question of whether they find employment opportunities faster or more efficiently. Because it is firstly the norms, both legal and social, associated with work and employment that this type of experiment is attempting to reconfigure, and thus its extension, then, in a new form, and its generalization to the whole country. In this sense, the invention of the CTP fits quite clearly into an orientation that borrows heavily from the model of flexicurity. And it certainly is not too risky to say that the terms of its extension in the form of a contract of occupational security, despite the incantatory reference to a security limited to financial compensation maintained for one year (even if not insignificant), are sacrificed first and foremost to the “demands” of mobility and flexibility, if not to a certain normality of job insecurity.

(20) The CTP was combined with the CRP (Convention de Reclassement Professionnalisé) by loi N° 2011-893 du 28 juillet 2011, which created the Contrat de Sécurisation Professionnelle (CSP).
It remains true that the survey, revealing the importance of the personal nature of work, also makes it possible to emphasise that what grew during the experiment, in a more or less isolated or collective way, were ways to implement the scheme and practice an expertise on and with others which places the person rather than the individual at the centre (see Roger 2012: 106-154). The experimental period is now at an end, but it was probably not inconsequential for these possibilities that could be maintained as long as the pressure and control, via the indicators and written documents, were not too strong. With the generalization of the scheme today—in a new form that will be explored—there is no doubt, in any case, that the recomposition of employment norms coupled with the ambiguities of the concept of “support” would itself be at stake every day in both practical and symbolic struggles, as much in the workplace as in the job re-training cells, the back-to-work structures and the employment offices of Pôle Emploi.

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